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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the way that opportunity of access to higher education, particularly for women of color and those disadvantaged by homelessness, is placed at risk by market approaches to education. In England, Asian and Afro-Caribbean women, have been able to access higher education through funds made available under the Race Relations Act of 1976. In Australia, homeless women have accessed higher education through a government-sponsored program of "second chance" education offered in a Sydney (Australia) university. Women students and administrators at programs in both countries were interviewed regarding their perceptions of the success and impact of these programs. The students emphasized their gains in self-esteem and greater future opportunities. Faculty and administrators focused more on issues of costs and benefits. Results suggest that government and institutional policy will impact significantly and adversely on women in higher education programs. The use of performance indicators of efficiency and effectiveness such as course completion rates do not include equity measures and discount the success of these programs. Homogeneity and elitism, under the guise of excellence and choice, are emphasized above the values of diversity and difference. (Contains 33 references.) (JLS)

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Access for women to higher education in England and Australia: A 'second chance'

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Abstract

Governments in the developed world use the market oriented rhetoric of choice and opportunity to rationalise the way that their educational policies provide access to opportunity for all (Major, 1994). The effects of such policies are, however, almost completely unresearched (Walford, 1992; 1994). Ethnographic research carried out in Australia and England illustrates the way that educational policies underpinned by economic rationalism (Pusey, 1991; Marginson, 1993) may lead to the further marginalisation and disadvantage of those in already disadvantaged positions (Dale, 1989; Gewirtz, Ball & Bowe, 1995).

This paper explores the way that opportunity of access to higher education, particularly for women of colour and those disadvantaged by homelessness, is place at risk by market approaches to education (Ball, 1993). In England, Asian and Afro-Caribbean women, in particular, have been able to access higher education through funds made available under Section 11 of the Race Relations Act of 1976 (Leicester, 1993). Until quite recently, up to half of the Afro-Caribbean students who went on to higher education in Birmingham, for example, did so through the special access route (Birmingham City Council Education Department, 1993). In Australia, homeless young women have accessed higher education through a government sponsored program of 'second chance' education offered in a Sydney university (McFadden, 1996).

The findings of this research indicate that government and institutional policy will impact significantly, and adversely, on the lives of many women involved as students in access to higher education programs. Government policies of corporatisation, including changed funding arrangements for students, when linked with changing curriculum structures, emerge as significant issues in entrenching disadvantage. Performance indicators of efficiency and effectiveness like course completion rates and staff/student ratios do not have a measure of equity built in and discount the relative successes of access courses. The pressing necessities of stringent financial times leads to the picking of winners rather than the provision of opportunity for those whose struggle is greater in the first place. This paper demonstrates that homogeneity and elitism, under the guise of excellence and choice, are emphasised in a corporatised higher education world rather than difference and real diversity being catered for as present institutional policies would have us believe.

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Introduction

While on study leave in Birmingham, England, in 1994, I gathered information about programs available for people of colour who wished to access higher education but who had either not finished their secondary schooling or had not done well enough to gain entry into higher education. In Sydney, Australia, I had been working, for a number of years, on a program that, seemingly, had quite different aims. This program targeted homeless young people who were interested in accessing higher education but whose previous educational experience had been less than successful. Methodologically, however, the differences between the programs were a powerful factor in analysing the information gathered in both sites about the relationship between 'second chance' education and government policy.

That the sites were in different countries and the programs focused on providing access to tertiary study to very differently disadvantaged groups represent Glaser and Strauss' (1967) notion of maximising the difference between cases to highlight core categories of analysis. The maximisation of difference between cases is consistent with the constant comparative method outlined by Glaser and Strauss (1967) (see also Strauss & Corbin, 1990). As Glaser and Strauss (1967) note, maximising difference between cases is done to increase the density of the properties relating to core categories that have emerged through initial analysis of the research data gathered. When differences are maximised, they argue, categories can be further integrated and the scope of the theory being generated can be delimited. Put simply, such maximisation of difference further focuses the generation of theory in secondary analysis.

The program in Sydney, Australia, focused on young people between the ages of 16 and 25 who had experienced homelessness and consequent educational disadvantage. The Access programs in Birmingham, England focused on people over 21 who had experienced educational disadvantage as a consequence of their race. Women, however, who had experienced similar forms of gendered educational disadvantage made use of both kinds of programs. Initially, I was interested in why people in these different programs usually with negative experiences of schooling, chose education as an option to help provide them with a more satisfying life, and whether their hopes and desires for this changed life were realised or whether previous educational disappointments were reinforced.

I interviewed students in both programs as well as interviewing students who were now at university after coming through the Access route. In England, I focussed on Access to Social Science courses which articulated with degree programs in Social Studies at Aston University, Birmingham. I also interviewed course and institutional administrators in both England and Australia. During the interviews, the policy issues of corporatisation, changing funding arrangements for students, and changing curriculum structures emerged as 'hot' topics. The common link between these issues was, 'the powerful and complex *ideology of the market and a linked culture of choice*' (Ball, 1993: 3) that pervades the policy frames of Western governments. All participants, including the students, felt that the world of access to higher education was changing and that incorporation and economic rationalisation, however the process was viewed, would have a significant impact on the provision of educational opportunity.

As Willis (1986) reminds us, people in positions of social disadvantage, particularly those in poverty, hope for 'open points of entry and re-entry' to education (p169) because they see education as a way to access opportunity. He describes, for example, the 'enormous investment' of Afro-Caribbean and Asian working class individuals in education, largely through the further education (FE) system. This is also true of individuals from a range of backgrounds in Australia (DEET, 1993). Willis (1986) posed the question whether such an investment would produce 'success' or redouble 'alienation and disillusion,' (p165) a question which my research, and this paper, seeks also to answer.

The Push to Corporatise and Rationalise

The last ten years has seen a marked shift in the application of market forces to the delivery of a range of educational services in both Australia and England (Dale, 1989; Marginson, 1993; Gewirtz, Ball & Bowe, 1995). Dale (1989) argues that far from being a uniform policy approach, what initially was characterised in the UK as 'Thatcherism'[1] is a 'settlement' between competing conservative interests. Writers like Dale (1992), Marginson (1993), and Ball (1993) refer to this 'coalition' of interests as 'the New Right', the economic thinking for which is based particularly on the economic work of Freidman (Marginson, 1993: 57). It is also referred to as corporatism or corporate managerialism (Pusey, 1991). Dale (1989) characterises the competing

[1] It is interesting to note the way in which variations in 'New Right' economic policy have been associated with the names of those in power at the time: Thatcherism in the UK; Reaganomics in the US; and Rogernomics in NZ.

interests at work in 'New Right' educational policy as industrial trainers with an interest in upskilling the potential workforce, old Tories with an interest in 'benevolent paternalism', populists with an interest in nationhood, moral entrepreneurs with an interest in preserving 'traditional' values, and privatisers with an intellectual and/or economic interest in the operation of market forces (pp80-89).

These competing interests are also seen to be at work in Australian education, but with differing effects largely because of the added complexity of federal/state relations (Henry, 1992; Marginson, 1993; 1994). It is clear though that at the same time as governments in both countries are trying to create the conditions in which a market could operate, that is, providing freedom of choice and diversity of services from which consumers can choose, that the state has paradoxically strengthened and centralised the curriculum structures of primary, secondary, higher, and further education (Whitty, 1994). Whitty (1994) argues that this curriculum strengthening reflects the traditional conservative ideology of control, and that financial deregulation and choice reflect the liberal ideology of the market. These paradoxical policies of regulation on the one hand and deregulation on the other operate within the restructured university system in Australia and the Further Education system in England through 'the logics of excellence and commercialisation' (Henry, 1992: 406).

Young (1994) argues 'there is a crisis in post compulsory education' (p1) in developed nations that

> ... is expressed in the wide variety of attempts to introduce greater flexibility within the curriculum, increase the opportunities for students to make choices and bridge the traditional divisions between academic and vocational learning. It is a crisis that is not educational in origin, but is a consequence of developments in the global economy, and the manufacturing and trading success of the new Asian economies (Young, 1994: 1).

Both Avis (1992, 1993), describing education in England and Wales, and Taylor and Henry (1994), describing Australian education, discuss the 'complex and ambitious policy agenda' of integrating aspects of industrial, economic, social and educational policy, 'via the schooling, TAFE and higher education sectors' (Taylor & Henry, 1994: 117). Some surprising, and not so surprising, alliances have emerged as a result of policy responses to the alleged 'crisis' in education. Avis (1993) points to the 'new settlement' emerging between industry and government in England and Wales in the area of vocational education and training, and Taylor and Henry (1994) discuss the

'new compact' between industry, unions and government in achieving educational reforms across all sectors in Australia.

These settlements and compacts represent the way in which educational discourses have become colonised by economic discourse and also the way in which educational reform is being influenced by this discourse. Resultant educational reforms are also often seen as part of a 'New Right' agenda to control curriculum structures and functionally apportion the 'right' sort of people into the 'right' sort of jobs for the good of the economy (Ball, 1993). Ball (1993) sees this 'New Right' agenda as a 'class' strategy which is linked to broad economic strategies by government, often referred to as 'economic rationalism' (Pusey, 1991). Marginson (1993) illustrates how the educational rhetoric of choice and opportunity often used by governments, might further marginalise and disadvantage those in already disadvantaged positions (see also McFadden, 1994).

Pusey (1991) illustrates how government policy in general cuts across structures of opportunity for disadvantaged groups, and Coleman and Warren-Adamson (1992) focus particularly on the effect of government policy on the lives of young people, demonstrating how government decisions have direct impacts on their lives, particularly those in already disadvantaged positions. Both Avis (1993) and Taylor and Henry (1994) express concerns about the way that government educational agendas may impact adversely on young people, women and ethnic minorities in particular. Citing a speech by Marginson, Taylor and Henry (1994) postulate that the policy outcome of reforms may be a new 'binary divide', mirroring the old mental/manual divide, 'between vocational and academic - understood as the distinction between "excellence" and "competency"' (p119).

Bates and Riseborough (1993) provide a sociological analysis of these policies of deregulation of provision and choice, and regulation of curriculum and content playing out in sites of education.

> The incoming tide of market pressures and related managerial approaches favour measurement of individual performance on singularized, nationally determined class-culturally biased criteria ... The new forms of curricula apparatus - the National Curriculum and the system of National Vocational Qualifications - vastly tighten control over educational and employment knowledge ... Borrowing from Bernstein (1971), they also tighten the 'classification' and 'framing' of success and failure. The resulting competition is no leveller; rather it brings social advantage and

> disadvantage more forcibly than ever into play ... in Beck's terms, 'community is dissolved in the acid bath of competition' (p5).

Added to the policy mix of deregulation and control as described above, Marginson (1993; 1994) adds a third component which he believes is crucial to understanding the workings of what he and Pusey (1991), among others, term 'economic rationalism'.[2] This third component is a preoccupation of government with economic issues and a view that all policy areas, for example education, are 'branches of economic policy' (Marginson, 1993: 56).

Taylor and Henry (1994) believe that in the context of market forces, equity will not fare well. This concern is shared by Bates and Riseborough (1993). It would seem that the concern rests on the premise that 'equity is unlikely to be achieved when access to education is determined by *ability to pay* and income is distributed unequally' (Le Grand & Robinson, 1984: 78). The findings of this research, particularly in relation to Access courses in England, support the view that the application of market forces in education is unlikely to benefit those in already disadvantaged social positions.

Access to Higher Education in England and Australia

In England, one aspect of the government's equity agenda relates to Afro-Caribbean and Asian communities. In 1978, the Department of Education and Science (DES) invited Local Education Authorities (LEAs) in England and Wales to provide Access courses to open up additional access to education and training for people from 'New Commonwealth' backgrounds. Such additional access was to be resourced from funds made available under Section 11 of the Race Relations Act of 1976. A report by Birmingham City Council referred to the use of Section 11 funding to effect change in educational provision for the city's black population in the following way.

> Over the last three years, about 10,000 students have benefited from this resourcing in areas as diverse as access to higher education, English Language Support and Black Business Development.

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[2] Citing Marginson, Henry (1992) points out the irrationality in much economic rationalist policy. For example, Marginson noted that Australia had one of the highest ratios in the world of science graduates to total population: 50.4 graduates for every 100,000 people. Such supply has not generated demand though for science graduates. Marginson argues that only a reconstruction of industry which creates more demand for these skills is economically rational.

> The success in the access to higher education project is about 70% in terms of those going on to higher education and work. Up to 50% of Afro-Caribbeans who went on to higher education in 1991 do so via the special access route.
>
> A substantial part of the increase in the number of ethnic minority students in City Colleges - 13000 to 18000 between 1990 and 1992 - is directly related to the use of Section 11 resources (Birmingham City Council Education Department, 1993: 23).

There are 'some 500 access courses across 96 Local Education Authorities (LEAs)' (Leicester, 1993: 61) in the UK. Up to 50% of Afro-Caribbeans who went on to higher education in Birmingham in 1991 did so through the special access route (Birmingham City Council Education Department, 1993: 23). Access courses have not been as successful as anticipated, however, in opening up higher education to the black community (Leicester, 1993). Other disadvantaged groups, particularly women seeking to re-enter education, have been able to make better use of these courses.

The approach to providing alternative entry pathways into Australian higher education institutions can best be described as *ad hoc* (Cobbin & Barlow, 1993). In response to federal government policy and the provision of financial incentives, each of the 36 universities in Australia has developed its own policy on pathways for admission for people experiencing educational disadvantage. Only quite recently has there been any attempt to communicate nationally the mechanics of such policies (Cobbin, Barlow & Gostelow, 1993; DEET: Higher Education Division, 1993).

The Sydney program in which I worked has now been running for eight years. Initially, the program was funded by the federal Australian government through an equity initiative, the submission for which argued the link between homelessness and poor mental and physical health. Education, it was argued, would not only give previously disadvantaged students new skills and abilities, but increase their self-esteem and sense of self-worth. The institutional aim of the program is clearly to provide the opportunity for students to access higher education. The majority of the students involved in the program choose to become involved voluntarily, and do so because they express a desire to change the circumstances of their lives. A university brochure describes the program as

> ... a response to seriously disadvantaged young people between the ages of 17 and early 20s seeking an opportunity to change their life styles through education ... [which] aims at lifting the minds and spirits of these young

> people by guiding and supporting them in their endeavours to gain competence sufficient to lead them on to higher, further education or maximum employment opportunities.

An independent evaluation of the program delivered in September 1993 indicated that just over half of the students who had been involved in the 1992 program 'were involved in some form of productive activity (such as work, further education or other programs' during the first half of 1993 (St Francis Welfare Committee, 1993: 18). Given 'the background and often problematic personal histories of those who enrolled, this is considered to be significantly positive' (St Francis Welfare Committee, 1993: 5).

Access: What the Students say

Even though the concept of Access in England was to encourage wider participation of people of colour in education and training, other groups with similar educational claims have 'colonised' the area (Leicester, 1993). For instance, women from all social classes, as a group, have used Access courses to re-enter mainstream education (Pascall & Cox, 1993). Women seem to be able to make better use of the opportunities which access and 'second chance' programs provide than do males (McFadden, 1996). The women in access courses, in both England and Australia, see education as crucial to developing their full potential as a person (see also Pascall & Cox, 1993). Males, on the other hand, tend to continue to see education as 'performance' oriented and therefore focus on what they continue to lack rather than on their developing competencies and skills.

All the women interviewed in this study, regardless of class or cultural background, had similar stories about how they were affected by low educational expectations, by early marriages and early pregnancies. Access for them is in many ways a pathway out of various forms of entrapment.

The Australian Students

For the Australian students, education does not only provide 'something to do', it is seen as delivering something 'better' to do with your time than either being on the dole or in a dead-end job. Ironically, when considered in relation to students' previous educational experiences, a further brush with education might be a way of realising that you in fact do have academic potential. That might just be the push that is needed to look for more educational opportunities to prove to yourself, and others, that you can

'do it'. In these ways, education becomes a solution to solving the problem of how to achieve a 'better' life and also a way of proving that there are good reasons why educational success has been elusive in the past.

All but a small number of students talk about not only wanting 'something to do' with their life but having something 'better' to do than 'being on the dole', 'having a cleaning job', 'just working in a shop' or 'just sitting at home'. Some have tried the '9 to 5 mundane' and are looking to education to give them something which will allow them to 'get on with life' and aim for a goal. For some, involvement in education and training programs run by agencies like the Commonwealth Employment Service (CES) or community organisations like the YWCA, unlike school, has already convinced them that they have some potential for further study.

> Alex: (...) I started doing this traineeship, because you know, you work 3 days a week and then you go to the college for 2, so you're getting a bit of money, enough to survive, and you're also getting um qualifications at the same time, which I wanted to do. And when I graduated I got 6 As and a B, and I think that's when I really realised that I did actually have a brain.

A small taste of educational success is often all these students need to see themselves as having the potential to link back into a mainstream which looks to them, from the outside looking in, as if it only provides opportunity and advancement to people unlike themselves.

For many students, schooling, and education more generally, has left them with such negative perceptions of themselves as learners that when they do get an opportunity at a second chance an overriding motivation is to prove, either to themselves, their teachers in absentia, or their families, that if they now suddenly have the potential then surely they also had it back then when the system failed them.

> Birk: ... I just wanted to do something. I wanted to get some education, just kind of prove to myself that I could do it.

> Melissa: I want to get into infants/primary teaching (...) I'm determined to prove them [her teachers and family] wrong, show 'em that, you know, that I can do it, that I've got it.

Kate: I remember one teacher, who I actually admired, and she said to my mother that I would never get my School Certificate, and after that I sort of said, right, I'm going to prove you wrong. (...) It sparked me off.

The 'it' that the students want to prove they can both 'do' and have 'got' is bound up with educational success. 'It' carries powerful images of self advancement, security, independence, intelligence, commitment and determination, and personal satisfaction. In the final analysis, being able to do 'it' defines what type of individual you are.

Tracey: ... this [program] was my answer to what I wanted.

School is no solution to the problem for these students of how to reaccess mainstream educational provision. The conformity of school is anathema to them. Students clearly see schools as having helped to construct the problem filled lifestyle that they now have. Even TAFE is often seen as 'too much like school', with the common view being if you really want advancement you have to go to university anyway.

Arrow: There's heaps of crap jobs, like you know, but who wants one?

Tess: Yeah, that's true, it's like you sort of look to higher ... further education but these days if you want to go through the normal channels you have to go like do your year 10 then ...

Arrow: Yeah and like you can't go back to school now.

The program is seen by students as 'a good alternative' to school and Technical and Further Education (TAFE) for a number of reasons. The majority of students are referred to the program through youth workers at refuges and welfare agencies. Particularly at refuges, the students have usually heard stories or know someone who 'has made it through'. There has also been front page newspaper publicity and prime time radio reportage about program successes both on the highest rating Sydney AM station and the national ABC FM youth station. The students believe that there will be others in the program like themselves. Students do not yet have to pay for the program. For many this is the major factor in deciding to come. The one year program length is attractive to people who believe they have wasted enough time already. Going through

TAFE for these people means at least two years before access to university is a possibility.

There is a clear connection for students between success in education and the ability to live a relatively stable and comfortable life. They want what most people want

> Alex: Um ... well ... probably ... like a better way of life in a way. Like, you know ... in Australia, to get anywhere you basically gotta have um ... either money or you gotta have like an education. So, in a way maybe if we were educated we could have more choices ... you know what I mean?

This is particularly so for Terri, aged 25, who is raising two young children as a single parent, left school in year 8 and wants a more satisfying life both for herself and her children.

> Terri: I said to the kids, if I don't do this course then I get a job in Franklins and we never have any money, (...) or I get an education. What's it going to be?

The English Students

Like many of the Australian students, the English students' motivation to succeed in the second chance stems from trying to prove themselves. Dianne, a 35 year old middle-class white woman now at university says:

> Dianne: At the end of school I was pushed to get a job. Like, at the end of school, I did think then perhaps this is a chance to, you know, I'm blowing it, perhaps I'd better stay on if I can. But I was not allowed to. I'd got to go out and get a job.
>
> MMcF: And where did that pressure come from?
>
> Dianne: From home. The access is a way of, the only way, at my age type of thing, of getting back or even having a chance to sort of see if I could've done it then.

The need for Dianne to prove herself to the 18 year old she was finds expression in her drive for perfection in her university studies.

Dianne: The biggest pressure for me is this striving for perfection. That's one of the biggest pressures. Like, I'm not satisfied with anything (...) I'm never satisfied. If I could just ease off and be satisfied.

Shaka, a 22 year old Asian woman in Access picks up Dianne's need to succeed. Although culturally very different, both women have been affected by low educational expectations.

Shaka: I've got the ability [to succeed in education], I know I've got the ability for university. I've just got to (...) The Access course has just given me the opportunity.

As with many of the Australian students, Georgina's motivation at succeeding in the second chance is aimed at her teachers who, she said, had convinced her that she was solely to blame for her lack of educational success.

Georgina: I wanted to prove my teachers wrong.

MMcF: Your teachers?

Georgina: Yeah (...) they made me feel like a complete failure.

Georgina's story is shared by many other Afro-Caribbean students like Trish and Mandy who felt their schooling had offered them no support or encouragement and no sense of belonging.

Sue, a white middle class woman in a Women's Access course reflects the views of others in her situation about the attractiveness of Access education.

Sue: For a lot of us, it [Access] fits in with our lifestyles. You can pick the children up after school. Like I've got 2 small ones and I was able to get them into the creche here and it's pretty well centrally situated.

Shana, an Asian woman in the same course (who characterised herself as lower middle class) married and had children immediately on leaving secondary school. She expressed similar views but also recognised the need in her situation to provide her own pathway to higher education.

Shana: Well, I had a long gap when I left school. I got married straight away and I thought if I have to do the A levels it'll be a waste of time. The kids are growing up fast and at the end of the day, the way I see it ... there's a push into higher education.

'Dead-end jobs' and education as 'a way out' pervade the rationales of the English students. Not only does education lead to the factory floor, but ironically, it also provides the opportunity for redemption. Both males and females come into the Access courses as a result of retrenchment or redundancy. This is a significant difference from the circumstances of the students in the Australian program. However, once education is offered as an institutional alternative then it is seen in precisely the same terms in both countries, as a way to a 'better' life. Like the Australian students, the vast majority of Access students see education as providing the chance to do 'something different' with their lives. Jan and Brenda, both working-class, white women, express the views of many.

Jan: It's a way out of poverty isn't it. To improve your own life around you.

Brenda: ... it's the fact that you're going to face those [shitty jobs] for the rest of your life. I mean, I was in a dead-end job in a factory and I couldn't cope any more. Then my redundancy came up (...) and that was the push to start pushing me into Access. And I thought, well maybe I can do it then.

Given the cultural and contextual differences between the Australian and English students there are remarkable similarities in the way in which schooling has helped construct the images of identity by which women in both countries live their lives. There are also remarkable similarities in the attitudes that these women have to education as a way forward in their lives. It is also clear that education is viewed by all the women involved in the programs as a crucial element in their plans to lead a constructive and productive life.

The Impact of Corporatisation and Economic Rationalist Policies

Analysis of the interviews conducted with administrators of SKATE and Access courses provide a unique opportunity to explore the impact of government and institutional policy on the lives of students in these courses. As this section of the paper will illustrate, the different institutional policy pressures, as they existed in Australia and the UK at the time of the study, created markedly different institutional responses and arrangements and therefore affected, and will continue to affect, student opportunity in significantly different ways.

In Birmingham, a regional administrator responsible for the initial development of Access provision in the LEA, who was at the time serving as the region's general adviser on further education, was interviewed. Also interviewed was the curriculum development manager of one of the local FE colleges and the Access course director in the same college. Each expressed reservations about the narrowing space available for Access provision in the changing world of corporate management models and rationalised funding. In Sydney, the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic) and the program director (PD) were interviewed about institutional arrangements for the program. They confirmed the way in which the federal government's concern to provide increased equity in the university system translated into expanded opportunities for certain students to participate in higher education.

The Impact of Government Policies on Access Programs in Birmingham

In an assessment of the impact of the Educational Reform Act, 1988, on racial equality of opportunity in FE colleges Reeves (1993) concludes:

> ... the measurement of performance and, therefore, the allocation of resources, are unrelated to (and positively discouraging of) equal opportunity outcomes. ... a new form of institutionalised racial discrimination lurks unrecognised in the use of general performance measures and management information systems which ignore, or at best de-emphasise, the considerable variations in student educational need and the resources needed to satisfy it (p263).

The **regional adviser** on further education believed that, 'Access has been one of the most successful curriculum initiatives in the history of education in the Birmingham area'. Access provision, he said, because of its success, had been colonised by groups for which the courses had not initially been intended.

> Steve: It has been mainstreamed, particularly by middle class white women ... They are already well qualified,

> articulate and write well, they just need a year to prepare themselves (SS - 6/5/94).

The lever which administrators had used in the past to attempt to limit the 'colonisation' of the program was a regulation that at least 70% of places had to go to people for whom Section 11 funding was initially targeted. From 1995, as part of the drive to efficiency, Section 11 funding ceased and with it went the administrative lever.

> Steve: That lever will disappear. So, in all the colleges, except for Handsworth [because of its predominantly black population] it will disappear. ... The conservatives do not believe in equal opportunity and the ethnic minority student could easily drop out of the equation (SS - 6/5/94).

Steve summarised his view of the new equation thus ...

> Steve: Colleges will not rate Access courses very highly. They will get a negative rating because of drop-out rates. They will be more selective about their students. They will emphasise initial assessment to get the students that they want and will probably run pre-Access courses. They will want to ensure positive outcomes (SS - 6/5/94).

At the curriculum development level within one FE college the **curriculum development manager** had some reservations about how Access courses fitted with the government's agenda to control curriculum structures and offerings within the sector. Importantly, he pointed to the connection between changed funding arrangements for students, changing curriculum structures and institutional management.

> Mike: The government froze student grants 3 years ago. They [the students] have to take out loans now. There is pressure for fees. ... It will be a matter of time before students have to pay a top-up fee for their courses. What we're being squeezed towards more is a part-time system of higher education which would fit more within this modular system [the move to NVQs and GNVQs]. It's like climbing a frame made up of units and modules, progression up is based on demonstrating achievement of learning outcomes .

> MMcF: Where does Access fit?

> Mike: Well, Access is interesting, because at the moment you would have people that say, well Access, they're self-validated courses which are equivalent to A levels. But over a period of time Access courses will have to pull in to this GNVQ framework (MW - 18/5/94).

Mike felt that Access courses that serviced local needs would be pulled in to the web of national benchmarks and nationally accredited course structures. He argued that colleges providing Access courses would experience national constraints and pressures which would override the initial community based intention of the courses. He also argued that even though the political rhetoric about change in further education was self-management and autonomy, experience had shown that the funding arrangements can change overnight. Mike gave the example of a shift in emphasis in 1992 in the university sector away from the humanities and towards the training and education of science and technology students. The shift in emphasis was associated with a 20% funding cut in the staffing budgets allocated to the humanities.

> Mike: They're trying to use funding methodologies to actually ration or allocate places (MW - 18/5/94).

This occurred after universities had been staffed for the upcoming university session and led obviously to a sense of destabilisation and a perception of the government rhetoric as empty.

The **Access course director** at the same FE college as Mike was quite pessimistic about the likely impact of government policy on the make-up of her Access students into the future. She believed that as funding arrangements became tighter, particularly with grants giving way to loans, drop-out rates would grow. This, she felt, would have an obvious 'knock-on effect' on course and institutional funding arrangements. Indicative of the effect of changed financial arrangements for students was the fact that some of them at the college were able to claim a locality allowance of £500 in the form of a bursary. She said that these students were obviously far less concerned about financial pressures than they were about their workload. For other students, one of their prime considerations was how they were going to continue to afford their studies.

A funding irony, which both the course director and the students pointed out, was that as an Access student one could stay on social security, including housing allowance and school meals for children. Once at university, and therefore as an Access success story, you became significantly worse off. Although you gained access to a grant, you lost

your social security, including school meals for children. The course director summed up her frustrations thus ...

> Kay: It's [Access] got a lot of people in [to university] who would never have dreamt of going to university. And it's got easier! Now it's got easier, the finance situation has changed and these people aren't going to be able to afford it. (...) I'm actually not optimistic about the next 5 years. I can't see any of the students I've had as being able to afford to remain at college because of changes to the grants system (KA - 6/5/94).

For Kay, the most difficult pill to swallow about policy moves in further education was the fact that through experience and hard, collaborative effort across the region, which included forging links with higher education institutions, it was becoming 'easier' to get students both through Access and into higher education. Now that this was a reality for her, she felt sure the policy changes referred to earlier were going to affect future successes and student opportunity.

It was the view of all those interviewed that corporatisation practices of the further education sector, and the related economic policies of rationalisation and efficiency, would have a major impact on the capacity of colleges to provide quality courses for the students that Access provision was originally intended for. This was thought to be particularly so for those of Afro-Caribbean and Asian origin who would not be perceived by college administrators as likely winners in the new funding game. It would also have a significant impact on women, not only from Afro-Caribbean and Asian backgrounds, but for middle class women returning to mainstream education who had come to see Access as a viable and relevant alternative route to higher education.

The Impact of Government Policies on the Sydney Program

The **program director (PD)** said that the initial establishment of the course had been made possible through a mental health initiative funded by the federal Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET), approved in 1988. After this approval, the program director (PD) felt the program would run on a year to year basis and be under constant financial pressure. In 1989, however, in a memo to all university staff, the university administration requested that suitable equity programs be identified to support the federal government's stated aim of providing more places at university for disadvantaged young people (see DEET, 1989). The program was identified as one

which could satisfy the university's need to argue to the federal government that equity concerns were being addressed within present funding arrangements.

> PD: It was a coincidence that the call for equity submissions coincided with the year of the Drug Offensive [a government initiative to address the incidence of drug abuse among young people]. (...) The program is now funded by the equity funds through the university (...) DEET devolved equity funds to the institution.

The **Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic)** of the university was particularly supportive of the program. At the time of its initial establishment, he was the institution's deputy principal.

> Pro VC (A): We decided at the university level to give it [the program] an EFTSU[3] quota, and just funded it out of the pipeline basically, so it wasn't new growth or anything.
>
> MMcF: What sort of EFTSU quota was it given?
>
> Pro VC (A): 25 I think. 'Cause there's no pipeline, it was just 25 in and 25 out. That might have gone up now I think to 38. I wouldn't swear to that number.

In a revealing insight into the funding process, the Pro Vice-Chancellor recounted the politically motivated way in which the program had received funding in its second year.

> Pro VC (A): They [DEET] broke the rules to fund it as a pilot program for the second year so it could get in to the Prime Minister's election policy statement in March 1990, otherwise it would have only got one year.

In terms of the university's continued funding of the program, the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic) made it clear that, as a one year course and in the light of current funding arrangements, the program was relatively attractive to fund. Indeed, as a short course, it could supply the university which much needed flexibility in the way it managed its student load.

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[3] EFTSU means effective fulltime student unit and is the unit of funding by which the federal Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) funds higher education institutions in Australia. EFTSU quota is managed in two ways: commencing quota; and total quota or overall student load.

> Pro VC (A): Let's assume the way DEET runs the profiles [of higher education institutions] stays. Let's assume there isn't a change of government, 'cause that makes things quite different. (...) It's very attractive to have some EFTSU that are one year pipelines (...) so you shift a number of commencing quota into one year pipelines. They don't have a carry-on the next year that you have to keep funding out of your total quota. (...) So there are two aims, one was the equity aim and the other was, if it doesn't hurt us, it will help us with our profile.

It is important to note that equity concerns in Australia must be addressed within institutional arrangements constructed by the discourse of economic rationalisation. As the Pro Vice-Chancellor indicates, the aims of equity and efficiency compete and satisfactory positions are negotiated which 'help' rather than 'hurt' the institution.

Conclusion

The provision of social opportunities like second chance education programs is affected by government policy and the decisions of those in positions of power within social institutions. 'Second chance' education can be a crucial institutional opportunity for helping people in positions of disadvantage to change their lives, in this case, allowing them to negotiate the disjunction between their previously poor experience of education and the hope they place in it for their future. The findings from this study illustrate the way in which government policies can have unintended social consequences.

In England, at a regional administration level there was a fear that nationally accepted performance indicators of efficiency and effectiveness like course completion rates and staff - student ratios do not have a measure of equity built in and would tend to discount the relative successes of Access courses. This will be particularly so for those of Afro-Caribbean and Asian origin who may not be perceived by college administrators as likely 'winners' in the new funding game. At both the regional and local level there was a fear that the pressing necessities of stringent financial times would lead to the picking of winners, rather than the supporting of those for whom the race was longer in the first place. Policy changes will obviously have a significant impact on women, not only from Afro-Caribbean and Asian backgrounds, but for working class and middle class white women returning to mainstream education who have come to see Access as a viable and relevant alternative route to higher education.

On the Australian political scene, changes, have, in fact, come to pass since these interviews. The most recent federal election in Australia saw the conservative Liberal/National coalition come to power. Like the previous Labor government, this new government is committed to economic rationalist policy but without the same mandated policy pressure to achieve equitable access and outcomes in higher education. The new government brought down a budget for 1997 which effectively cuts university funding by between 5-12% over three years. Cuts of this magnitude will very likely have an impact on the kinds of students who will be able to access higher education into the future. The government has also increased student fees and has expressed a determination to increase the range of courses for which full fees can be charged. Equity program funding will not be immune from these significant cuts and changes in policy. They will obviously affect the institutional opportunity of a range of students, particularly those disadvantaged by homelessness, to enter the higher education sector.

Note: Pseudonyms have been used to protect the identities of the people involved in this study.

Key to transcripts

[ ] Background information

... Pause

(...) Material edited out

-___ Transcription from different section of the interview or from a different interview follows

* From field notes

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